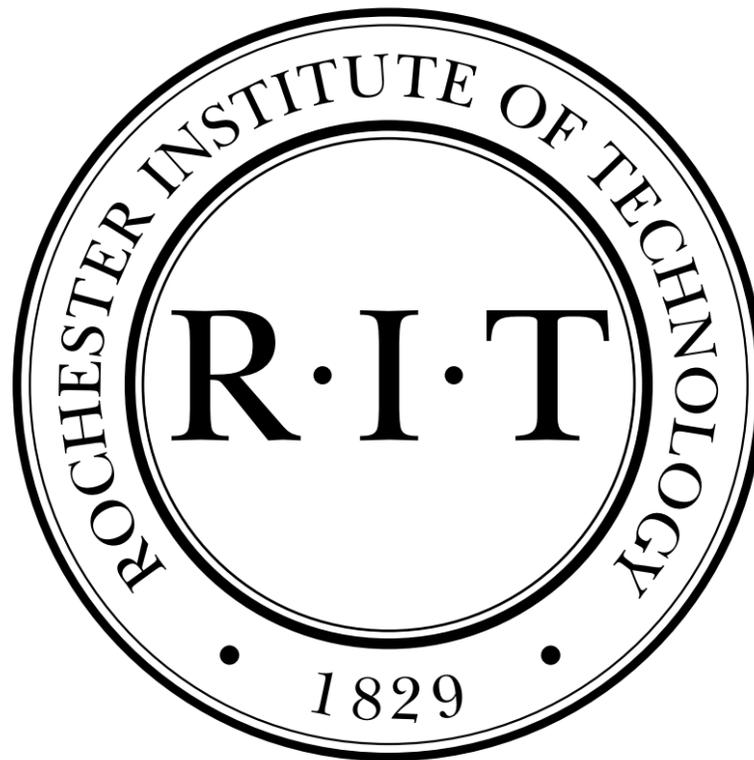


**IMAGINE:  
A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR  
GRADUATE EDUCATION AT RIT –  
VISION 2020**



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Dean of Graduate Studies  
Co-Chair – Graduate Education Strategic Task Force

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



*The best way to predict the future is to create it.*  
—Alan Kay

Over the past five decades, graduate education at RIT has grown from a few niche programs to a complex array of professional and research-oriented degrees constituting a diverse and unique portfolio of high-quality degrees in the visual arts, humanities, business, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The trademark of RIT graduate education reflects and expands upon its strong tradition of undergraduate education: skilled and innovative professionals who are highly desired by industry; Master in Business Administration (MBA) and Master in Fine Arts (MFA) graduates who continue to push the frontiers of entrepreneurship and innovation; and independent, advanced degree researchers and professionals capable of leadership roles worldwide in industry, academia, and government. Graduate enrollment is projected to continue its growth and diversification as well as to contribute significantly to enrollment growth in the coming decade.

The evolution of graduate education at RIT has occurred in a decentralized fashion, in some ways peripheral to or added on, rather than integrated with, its undergraduate mission. Expansion of graduate education at RIT continues under this paradigm, in the face of enormously complex opportunities and challenges.

Provost Jeremy Haefner charged the Task Force for Graduate Education in fall 2012 with crafting a strategic plan that would address challenges and take advantage of opportunities. The task force engaged in an inclusive and extensive campus-wide dialogue, securing input from graduate students, faculty, graduate program directors, College Deans, and administrators. It also engaged in extensive benchmarking with both current and aspirational peers. The strategic plan **we offer** below is the result of thoughtful and thorough deliberation by faculty, staff, and administrators highly committed to future excellence and innovation in graduate education. The plan articulates several foundational principles needed to meet RIT's complex challenges and take full advantage of the opportunities.

### **Principles for the Future of Graduate Education at RIT**

- 1) Graduate education at RIT **will be central to, and fully integrated** with, the University's current and future strategic plans. Planning and implementation will be embedded in all aspects of RIT's operation, from academic content to resources and facilities, to financial viability to a graduate environment that fosters innovation, creativity, and leadership of the highest order. The next University-wide strategic plan will include explicit language addressing the centrality of graduate education to the University's overarching goals.
- 2) The pursuit of excellence and the Graduate Experience will be the major drivers for the graduate portfolio at RIT. It will seek the purposeful integration of professional, creative, business, and STEM experiences.
- 3) Graduate education at RIT will be informed and enriched by respectful and deep mutual understanding of all the cultures of graduate education, from the visual arts to the humanities, business, the professions, and the STEM disciplines.
- 4) The planning and implementation of graduate education at RIT will be data- and assessment-driven, financially sound, and managed with clear lines of responsibility and accountability on the part of individual Colleges and central administration.
- 5) **Graduate education at RIT will be supported by** dedicated, experienced, and competitive faculty **members**, as well as knowledgeable and caring professional staff. **RIT will be committed to recruiting and retaining exceptional new faculty and**

- providing all faculty members with the resources, facilities, mentoring, intellectual environment, and supportive graduate community necessary to their success. RIT will also be committed to the professional growth of staff serving graduate programs University-wide.
- 6) The development of the graduate portfolio at RIT will follow the guidance set by the Academic Portfolio Blueprint, with special attention to individual programs or program clusters that best address the quest for excellence and distinction in research, scholarship and the professions.

In order to uphold and realize these principles, the task force proposes a strategic plan with the following interrelated and interdependent themes:

### **Strategic Plan Themes**

#### **Strategic Plan Theme 1: Academic Excellence**

All graduate programs at RIT will strive to educate professionals, creators, and researchers in their respective disciplines/interdisciplines, capable of higher-level problem solving, critical thinking, career flexibility, ethical reasoning, and global citizenship and leadership. This will be achieved through strategic recruitment and marketing, delivery of an exceptional graduate curriculum, development of a nurturing professional and scholarly environment, and clearly defined and measurable input and output metrics and goals.

#### **Strategic Plan Theme 2: Structure and Administration**

Achieving higher quality and prestige in graduate education will require strategic leadership and oversight from the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS), in partnership with College Deans and individual graduate programs. The responsibilities of the OGS will be clearly defined and delineated, with particular attention to mechanisms for incentivizing, rewarding, and ensuring the quality of graduate scholarship and professionalism. The OGS will have oversight of all graduate policies in partnership with the Graduate Council. The OGS and College partners will be provided with the appropriate resources to meet their responsibilities.

#### **Strategic Plan Theme 3: Graduate Education Revenue and Cost**

The graduate program portfolio at RIT will reduce its financial dependence on undergraduate tuition and will aspire to achieve a balance of revenue-generating and resource-intensive programs that best serve the interests and mission of each individual College and of the University at large.

#### **Strategic Plan Theme 4: Data-Driven Planning and Assessment**

Continuation of the data gathering and benchmarking started during the strategic planning process will be crucial to the success of the strategic plan, resulting in a data- and assessment-driven graduate culture. Long-term data-driven planning will include graduate student in-house surveys, exit and alumni surveys, learning outcome assessment, external benchmarking and evaluation, and detailed output analyses (graduate placement, residencies, exhibitions, awards, leadership, program rankings, etc.), as well as ongoing assessment of successes and addressing needed improvements in targeted areas.

#### **Strategic Plan Theme 5: Graduate Student Experience**

RIT will develop an inclusive, caring, and engaged graduate experience that prepares students beyond their specific professional skills for global adaptability and leadership.

**Integral to this experience will be a campus culture and environment welcoming to graduate students that promotes their specific needs in regard to work-life balance.**

The task force **is hopeful** that this strategic plan will help ensure a bright future for graduate education at RIT and beyond.

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## BACKGROUND

### Graduate Education at RIT: A Young Endeavor



The development and growth of graduate programs at RIT is a relatively recent part of its history. In the 1960s, RIT started graduate programs in all of the cultures of scholarship and creativity that it **nurtures**, from the humanities to the arts, business, and the STEM disciplines. Over the years, graduate education at RIT has become a unique and diverse portfolio, now comprising more than 60 degrees at the MS level, and **twelve** terminal degrees (6 MFAs and 6 PhDs, with an additional PhD program projected for fall 2014). The STEM PhD programs date back to the late 1980s (Imaging Science), with five more doctoral degrees added in the past 12 years. Graduate enrollment has grown considerably, especially in the past 10 years, and is projected to reach close to 3,000 by fall 2013. Graduate students **are expected to continue to account for a significant percentage of new student enrollments in the foreseeable future**. By 2020, graduate enrollment might approach 20% of the total student population. These trends reflect both higher demand and visibility in the global market. Graduate applications have increased by 50% in the past five years, **and reached more than** 6,000 this year. Fewer than 50% of graduate applicants are admitted and admissions to several programs in the STEM and the arts are approaching a selectivity ratio of 1/10.

Underlying the growth of graduate programs is a significant shift in demographics. The non-traditional student base, anchored in relatively few large corporations based in the Rochester region (e.g., Kodak, Xerox, Bausch & Lomb) has declined, and currently the majority of graduate students are full time and closer to the traditional college age. International students represent over 60% of the total, and in several programs ranging from arts to STEM, students from only two countries (India and China) account for 80-90% of enrollment. These trends are expected to solidify/increase in the coming years.

The increased visibility of graduate education at RIT **is complemented by a** strong measure of sustained quality. The STEM programs continue to produce highly sought-after engineering graduates in key fields (manufacturing, microelectronics, industrial, etc.) as well as in niche professional and research areas (computer science, imaging science, etc.). RIT's expertise in remote sensing is globally recognized, and emerging areas such as sustainability continue to exemplify RIT's brand of applied research and strong corporate partnerships. Four of the six MFA programs continue to rank consistently in the top ten in the nation. Graduate programs at RIT are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary in nature, especially at the doctoral level, although perhaps the full potential is yet to be **reached**, as might also be the case for most of RIT's peer institutions (ARISE II Report, 2013). The purposeful integration of the various cultures of graduate education (arts, humanities, STEM, and business) might in fact be a main differentiator for RIT's future competitiveness and global **impact**.

### **Strategic Planning Process**

During the summer of 2012, the Dean of OGS engaged with the Deans Council and the trustees subcommittee on Graduate Education and Research to craft the guiding principles for a strategic plan task force. Provost Haefner charged the task force in October 2012 (Appendix 1), and deliberations started. In the tradition of shared governance, the task force was co-chaired by the Dean of OGS, Hector Flores, and the chair of the Graduate Council, Agamemnon Crassidis. The task force membership was developed by Dean Flores and Provost Haefner in consultation with the College Deans, and included at least one representative from each College; two from the PhD programs; and members from the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR),

Enrollment Management & Career Services (EMCS), and the Center for Multidisciplinary Studies (CMS). The task force engaged in an extensive and inclusive campus-wide outreach effort to secure input. The co-chairs visited with each college leadership team to gather information and secure feedback on the task force charge. The information-gathering approach was based on the SOAR approach (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results; Cockle and McArthur-Blair, 2012), an alternative to the traditional SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats; recent research indicates that SOAR is becoming a preferable and more engaging approach to academic strategic planning). The SOAR survey of program directors (Appendix 2), which included a request to reach out to graduate faculty, yielded a response of about 85%. The initial analysis indicates a broad sense of pride and accomplishment in graduate programs campus wide, and a positive outlook on which to build further excellence and recognition.

The SOAR survey of program directors was complemented by PhD- and MS-level surveys, crafted in consultation with the Offices of Institutional Research (OIR) and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment (SLOA) (Appendices 3 and 4). The former yielded over 80% response, and the latter about 25%, for an overall response rate of 30% campus wide. Over 80% of the responses were from students in their first or second year of graduate study. Overall, the satisfaction level was about 4 on a 5-point scale, suggesting a good foundation on which to build the future graduate experience. Responses also suggested that improvement is needed in three areas: graduate advising (faculty and professional staff), professional and career development, and graduate climate (Appendix 5). College- and program-level responses were shared with the Dean of each College.

The baseline information described above was complemented with extensive benchmarking done by the Dean of OGS and shared with the committee, focusing on strategic plans from current and aspirational peers (MIT ODGE plan, 2011; RPI plan, 2013). In addition, in order to share their ideas, the task force hosted visits from the Vice President for EMCS (Dr. James Miller), the Vice President for Finance and Administration (F&A, Dr. James Watters) and Mr. Ross Koenig [clarify position of Ross Koenig], as well as Manny Contomanolis from EMCS, and the Associate Dean of CIAS, Twyla Cummings. Provost Haefner visited the task force twice. The task force met almost weekly during winter and spring quarters. The strategic plan was presented to Provost Haefner in May 2013, with initial vetting by the Deans Council in July and presentation to the Board of Trustees subcommittee on Research and Graduate Education in July 2013. Outreach to the Colleges and University governance, seeking feedback, continued through this fall, including a unanimous endorsement from Graduate Council and presentation to Academic Senate in October 2013. The strategic plan was endorsed at the Board of Trustees meeting Nov 7-8, 2013.

## Prospect

Graduate education at RIT is now a complex and diverse endeavor, comprising multiple processes and outcomes while relying on the traditional inputs of quality, environment, and resources (Appendix 6, concept map). As mentioned earlier, graduate education at RIT continues in a decentralized, organic fashion, in some ways peripheral to, rather than integrated with, its undergraduate mission. This modality continues in the face of enormously complex opportunities and challenges. Two major questions addressed by the task force were whether this decentralized growth should continue as such, as opposed to seeking a more strategic balance University-wide,

and whether graduate education should become fully integrated into the life and culture of RIT.

Among other challenges, we must address major shifts in demographics and workforce needs, and fierce competition for resources, foremost among them high-quality faculty and outstanding students. The paradigms for curriculum development, **graduate advising and career preparation** that we took for granted for most of the second half of the last century will likely not be adequate in **the 21<sup>st</sup> century** (Walker et al., 2008). Grand challenges such as sustainable development, climate change, energy supply, and population access to healthcare and well being will require new models for training and collaboration across government, industry, and academia (ARISE II, 2013). New developments, such as the massive open online courses (MOOCs) **are** introducing consequential changes to the existing models for education delivery and driving innovation in teaching and learning. Trans-disciplinary collaborations that create new conceptual integrations across the physical and natural sciences are likely to become the foundation for future graduate education. RIT can play competitively in this arena, but this will require a careful look at the structural, intellectual, and cultural issues that underlie its graduate portfolio. The plan **proposed** below is aimed at addressing these challenges and embracing the opportunities. This will require no small amount of reflection and dialogue, but it will also be a chance to reinvent what we do best, strategically and purposefully, within an innovative and caring community of teachers and learners.



## GRADUATE EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

*If you don't know where you are going, you are certain to end up somewhere else.*  
—Lewis Carroll, paraphrase of Alice's encounter with the Cheshire cat

The task force has developed and organized the following strategic themes around the principle of graduate student-centered excellence. We begin and end with the most important and only non-negotiable aims underlying any academic endeavor, the quest for excellence, and **the commitment to ensure** rich and long-lived graduate experience at RIT. Embedded within these foundational strategic goals are three crucial operational themes that will enable graduate student-centered excellence: a proposed revision of current structure and administrative practices related to graduate education, academic recommendations **for an operational and financial cost model that achieves a self-sustaining** graduate education portfolio, and the data-driven planning and assessment required to achieve it. The proposed themes are integrated, interrelated, interdependent, and iterative.



**Strategic Theme 1 - Academic Excellence:**  
**striving to be the very best we can be**



*I have great faith in a seed.  
Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.*  
—Henry David Thoreau

After extensive data gathering, discussions, and outreach to the campus community, the strong consensus of the task force is that RIT has a solid foundation on which to build further excellence in graduate education, with strong potential for world-class niche professional programs as well as research innovation of the highest caliber. The response to the SOAR survey of graduate program directors points to pride and confidence in higher aspirations, and the response to the graduate student surveys indicates overall satisfaction with the graduate experience at RIT, while also targeting areas in need of further quality enhancement.

Discussions on excellence, essential to an engaged academic community of learners, also pose the risks of missing the forest for the trees. It is not the intent of the task force to suggest, or impose, a definition of excellence other than the quest to be the very best we can be with the resources available to us, of which the most important is our shared intellectual and human capital. We believe it is best for the individual programs to agree to, and be responsible for, specific criteria for excellence best suited to their fields. At the same time, it is the task force's strong consensus that we can all agree to a path towards excellence that is applicable across the University, and that hinges on identifying, gathering, nurturing, and enabling the blossoming of the seeds of excellence that Thoreau challenges us to find. We propose that excellence is both an act of faith and a deliberate path that we can follow best as a community, building a stronger path in the process. The recommendations we propose below are based on an engineering analogy, an input-state-output model that sets an iterative culture of continuous improvement. We strengthen the model by suggesting a purposeful building of a culture of pride, integration, and recognition of graduate education into the RIT culture at large.

### **Input: the “fuel” driving excellence**

- a. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will have a proactive plan to compete for the very best students globally, coordinated at the level of each college's set of graduate programs. To this end, each program will develop a long-term, data- and results-driven recruitment plan, guided by continuing assessment.

#### **Action Steps**

- i. Strategic marketing and branding with emphasis on interactive social media.
- ii. A set of metrics to monitor and increase incoming student quality including but not limited to high selectivity, high acceptance yield, and a set of quality indicators (GPAs, strong scholarly/creative portfolio, GRE and GMAT scores, TOEFL, and peer-reviewed publications as appropriate).
- iii. Five-year goals to increase quality of student applicants.
- iv. Five-year goals to understand the peer institutions competing for, as well as the source of, higher quality applicants.
- v. Development of a detailed understanding of resource structure and limitations (fellowships, scholarships, etc.) that might affect recruitment of

high-quality applicants, and integrate the data into a plan for competitiveness.

- b. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will engage the most qualified, experienced, and committed faculty capable of delivering a first-rate graduate program experience.

**Action Steps:**

- i. A process to recruit and select graduate program faculty, and provide them with the physical and financial support to advise the highest-quality graduate students.
  - ii. A process to mentor the graduate faculty on graduate mentoring.
  - iii. A mechanism to recognize and reward faculty for excellence in graduate teaching and creativity, as well as scholarship directly related to graduate education and research.
  - iv. A mechanism to prepare faculty for outstanding graduate curriculum development and delivery.
- c. **Strategic Goal:** The University will ensure that every graduate program has appropriate space, instrumentation, studio facilities, and exhibition venues, as well as appropriate graduate student office or work space.
- d. **Strategic Goal:** The Colleges and the University will ensure that every graduate program will develop a plan and process to monitor the strategic and effective use of resources towards graduate education.
- e. **Strategic Goal:** The Colleges and the University will develop a deep understanding and make effective use of the scholarships, fellowships, and other financial support necessary to recruit the highest-quality students (see Strategic Themes 3 and 4).

**State: The engine of change transforming our students**

- a. **Strategic Goal:** Every graduate program at RIT will provide an outstanding academic experience, the hallmarks of which will be:
- i. An innovative curriculum driven by outstanding and challenging courses.
  - ii. A graduate advising environment that guides the student from being an apprentice and a processor of knowledge to becoming a professional colleague and a creator of knowledge (collaborative mentorship).
  - iii. Preparation of the student for professional self-sufficiency, guided by faculty and peer-to-peer mentoring, appropriate field/real-world experiences (corporate, academic, and non-profit coops; teaching skills; exhibitions; residencies), and the nurturing of a unique professional, research, and/or aesthetic voice.

- iv. Empathetic and supportive mentoring and advising that uphold the highest expectations for excellence.
  - v. A graduate environment and culture conducive to inspiring faculty/student interactions, enabling the creation of diverse spaces for creativity and innovation (see Strategic Theme 5).
  - vi. A graduate environment that, as appropriate to specific programs, transcends traditional interdisciplinary structure and promotes trans-disciplinary preparation for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce (Arise Report, 2013).
- b. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate **education** at RIT will **offer** a broad array of analytical (quantitative and qualitative, along with mixed methodologies), as well as communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills (see also Strategic Plan Theme 5), **providing** nimbleness and flexibility **in** career choices and professional retooling during the entire career trajectory.
  - c. **Strategic Goal:** The excellence of graduate education at RIT will be recognized through development of graduate student awards internally (i.e., thesis and dissertation awards, juried exhibitions for creative work) and take full advantage of external recognition (high level of success for national and international fellowships, national nominations for best dissertation, competitive exhibitions, student papers, etc.; see Strategic Theme 5).

#### **Output: Life-long stewards, leaders, and learners**

- a. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will graduate students to be competitive in their career choice, through the mastery of the graduate program's subject matter and acquisition of higher-level problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, and communication and relationship-building skills.
- b. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will graduate students adaptable to changing trends, **to enable** long-term career growth. University-wide, metrics will be developed to measure adaptability to a faster changing work environment and to monitor success in this rubric (see Strategic Plan Theme 4).
- c. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will graduate ethical future leaders and stewards for their careers/professions, capable of the highest level of innovation, and **engagement** in the global community.
- d. **Strategic Goal:** Graduate programs at RIT will prepare students for long-term engagement and contribution in their profession, community and RIT. This will involve **enhanced** social networking to keep graduate alumni engaged; involve alumni as guest speakers, mentors, career advisors, etc.; and promote life-long learning (see Strategic Plan Theme 5).

**Strategic Theme 2 - Structure and Administration:**  
**Facilitating a strategic, University-wide evolution of graduate education,  
while upholding college-based responsibilities**



The academic structure of the graduate programs at RIT has been decentralized since their origins in the 1960s, and the current processes for growth, administration, and accountability remain with the individual colleges and programs. The task force does not expect, nor does it suggest, that this should be changed in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the task force proposes that the time has come to re-examine how RIT administers and evolves its graduate portfolio, particularly in the face of financial, intellectual, and workforce challenges that are more complex than ever before. The task force suggests that careful thought and planning be given to the appropriate balance of College-based accountability and administration, with strategic and thoughtful oversight at the University level.

- a. **Strategic Goal:** Review graduate program policies on a periodic basis in partnership with the OGS and the Graduate Council and in consultation with the Deans Council.

#### **Action Steps**

New policies or guidelines for graduate programs should be developed in the following areas:

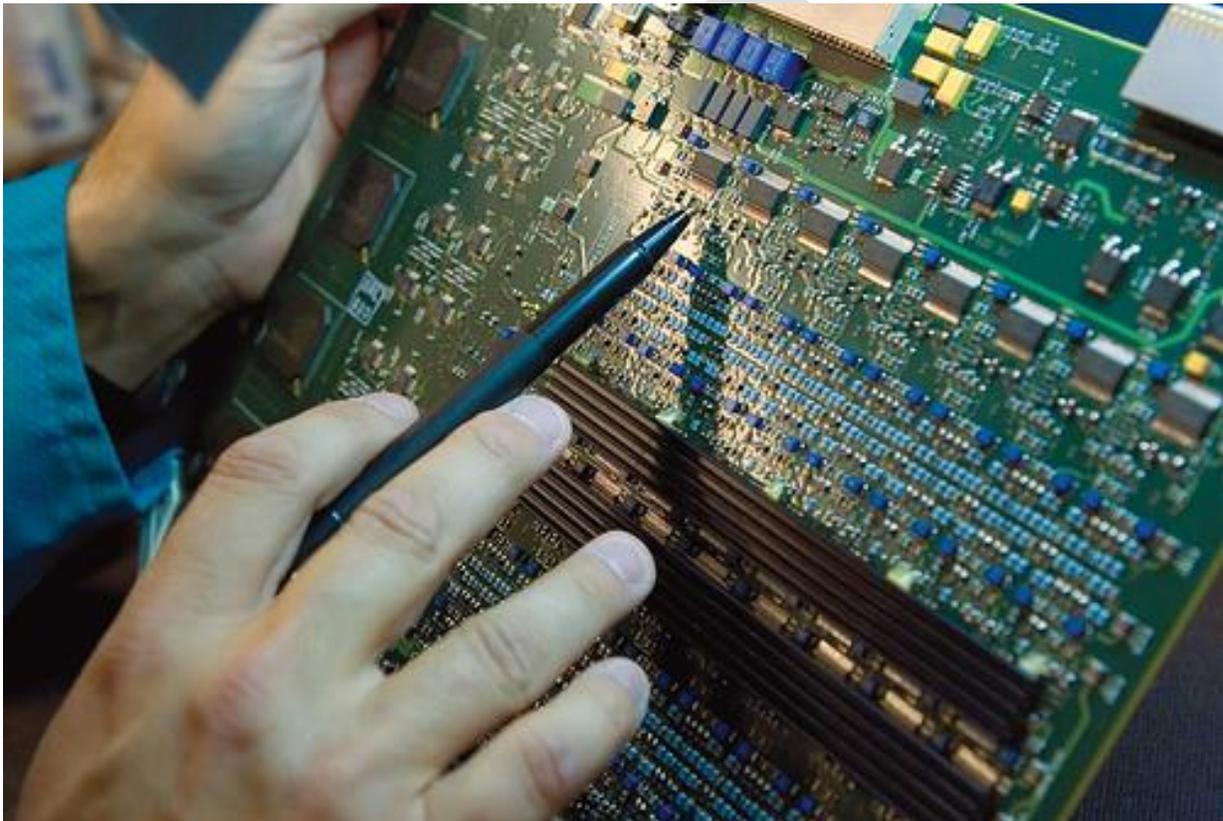
- i. Published written element of the graduate culminating experience (i.e., **dissertations, theses** and capstone projects), guided by University-wide standards, **while** recognizing the individual graduate program responsibility for content and for meeting accreditation requirements.
  - ii. Course credit waiver and transfers (including professional training, experience, and online degree alternatives such as MOOCs and future models)
  - iii. **Conflict resolution procedures for graduate students and faculty.**
  - iv. Expectations for graduate student professional/personal ethics and conduct.
- b. **Strategic Goal:** The relationships between the OGS, Graduate Council, College Deans, and graduate program directors and their respective responsibilities regarding graduate education will be reviewed and assessed.

#### **Action Steps**

- i. Revise the charter for the OGS to add the necessary element consistent with this strategy, with the participation of and vetting by faculty governance and RIT administration.
- ii. Define the future scope of the OGS roles and responsibilities towards the goal of excellence in graduate education University-wide.
- iii. Refine and expand the scope of the OGS roles and responsibilities in support of graduate student professional development, research/creative activities, teaching assistantship, and advocacy for graduate student representation, issues, and needs.

- iv. Identify the appropriate resources for the OGS to accomplish its revised roles and in support of graduate student professional development, and scholarly and creative student activities University-wide.
  - v. In collaboration with the Graduate Council and the Provost's Office, oversee program compliance with New York State Education Department (NYSED) regulations and with the requirement of appropriate accrediting bodies.
  - vi. Provide input into the periodic review of graduate program performance, including progress towards meeting the defined quality metrics.
  - vii. **Change the name of the OGS to Office of Graduate Education, in alignment with the scope of this strategic plan and with current national and global trends.**
- c. **Strategic Goal:** College- and University level guidelines and policies (as appropriate) will be developed/revised to better define:
- i. Roles and responsibilities and academic credentials of faculty involved in graduate programs, with emphasis on appropriate recognition of such activities in the faculty workload and performance evaluations and in promotion/tenure decisions.
  - ii. Roles and responsibilities of graduate program directors/coordinators, including procedures for appointment, term limits, and performance appraisal.
  - iii. The guidelines and policies under i. and ii. will be responsive to analyses of program costs and revenues (Strategic Theme 3) and data-driven planning and assessment (Strategic Theme 4). Once these guidelines and policies are developed, the responsibility for their implementation and observance shall reside within the Colleges.
- d. **Strategic Goal:** Develop administrative structures/processes needed to accommodate future graduate programs that are truly trans-disciplinary in nature (Arise2 Report, 2013).

**Strategic Theme 3 - Graduate Education Cost and Revenue:**  
Promoting academic drivers for self sufficiency



*I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.*

—Blanche Dubois in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*

### Strategic Plan Theme 3 – Graduate Education Revenue and Cost

The **revenue-cost balance** of graduate education at RIT is in large part a reflection of its decentralized nature. Graduate programs have grown in number, diversity, and excellence through college-based, faculty-driven initiatives, with relatively limited planning University-wide. **Not surprisingly, graduate education at RIT continues to depend significantly on undergraduate tuition revenue**, according to the cost model developed by the Vice President for Finance & Administration (Appendix 7). As the revenue margin from undergraduate tuition **contracts** due to limits placed on annual tuition increases **and changes in incoming student demographics**, it is **appropriate for RIT to revisit the financial model for graduate education**. **Another** reason to re-examine the cost model is that future graduate enrollment at RIT is expected to continue to increase as a percentage of total enrollment.

The directive given in the Provost's charge to the task force that relates to the revenue-cost balance for graduate education includes the following elements:

“Charge 3f. A plan for an operational and financial cost model that achieves a self-sustaining steady state.”

“Guiding Principle 9. Graduate programs will operate under a sustainable budgetary model without undue burden on undergraduate operations”

The strong consensus of the task force is that the Provost's charge and guiding principle is best considered an aspirational goal and a revenue-cost balancing issue, achieved through **strategic collaboration** between the offices of Academic Affairs (including the Office of Graduate Studies), Finance and Administration, and Enrollment Management.

#### Strategic Recommendations

- a. The growth in quantity and quality of research and scholarship-based graduate programs is fundamental to the RIT aspirations for prestige, distinction and visibility. Progress towards a financially viable graduate portfolio should align with this principle.
- b. The aspirational path towards a financially viable graduate education portfolio should be initiated by the academic stakeholders, in close partnership with the offices responsible for finances and enrollment. The task force recommends that the Provost establish a graduate portfolio committee, charged with crafting a process to reach an appropriate balance of revenue-generating graduate programs and resource-intensive, research-based graduate programs. Strategic intercollege collaboration and coordination will be crucial to this process.
- c. The path to the aspirational goal will include, but not be limited to, a periodic review of the graduate portfolio, with close attention to the balance of professional degrees, creative arts degrees, and business and STEM degrees. This will **in turn** be closely coordinated with the periodic review of graduate programs. **The strategic enhancement of online graduate program enrollment and development of new ones should be targeted as an important driver of the revenue/cost balancing goal.**
- d. The growth in quantity and quality of the graduate portfolio will be **enabled** by a **University-wide wide Research and Graduate Education Endowment** that **provides** competitive fellowships and scholarships in all areas of graduate endeavor (creative arts, humanities, STEM disciplines, entrepreneurship).
- e. The graduate experience for all terminal degrees (PhD, MFA) **and research-based MS degrees** will include a new model for teaching assistantships, to enable enrichment of

the graduate student's skill set, enhance interactions between undergraduate and graduate students, and provide a quality alternative or complement to adjunct teaching. **This model should be crafted so as to help enhance the financial viability of the future graduate portfolio.**

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**Strategic Theme 4 - Data-Driven Planning and Assessment:**  
Strengthen partnerships and coordination to provide an ongoing,  
robust data set for graduate education at RIT



Reflecting the decentralized nature of graduate program development and administration, RIT currently has a fragmented approach to generating and incorporating data into graduate education planning, and for assessing program accomplishments relative to resource allocations. For example, while graduate retention and completion rates are tracked by the Office of Institutional Research, there appears to be a wide variation in individual program tracking of student progress and degree completion, and quality and effectiveness of graduate advising, both of which are fundamental in ensuring student success. Currently, program costs and revenues relative to program accomplishments and faculty-to-student ratios are neither routinely nor uniformly analyzed across the University. Most of the Institutional student surveys addressing the academic experience have been aimed at undergraduates, and until recently we have had no dedicated academic surveys of on-campus graduate students. Likewise, assessment of graduate learning outcomes is at an earlier stage of development than the corresponding undergraduate assessments. At the faculty level, we need data that address the needs and concerns of the graduate community at large. Recognizing these limitations, and as part of the data-gathering process for our strategic plan, the OGS conducted the first comprehensive survey of the graduate academic experience in winter 2012, as well as a SOAR survey of graduate program directors, with very encouraging response rates for the SOAR and PhD surveys. The recommendations under this theme build on these initial results.

#### **Strategic Recommendations**

- a. The OGS will conduct comprehensive graduate student surveys on an annual basis; results will be shared with individual Colleges and programs. It will be the responsibility of the individual Colleges to incorporate the survey results into plans to address student concerns and improve processes.
- b. In partnership with the Alumni Relations Office, the OGS will conduct exit surveys and alumni surveys to complement the in-house surveys; results will be shared with College Deans and graduate program directors. Alumni surveys will focus on skills needed for flexible career paths.
- c. In partnership with the VP for Student Affairs, the OGS will develop and administer surveys of graduate student life on a biannual basis, to assess the specific needs of graduate students (housing, day care, on campus and off campus life issues, graduate student counseling, spouse employment, etc.).
- d. The OGS will partner with the Offices of IR and SLOA to share the results of the above surveys and develop a process for analysis, sharing, and refinement of other data-gathering activities occurring University-wide (learning assessments, retention and completion rates, etc.).
- e. The OGS will partner with the Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services to secure data to help improve the career preparation and placement of graduate students, to enrich the graduate coop experience, and identify novel opportunities for career development and placement.

- f. The OGS will work with the individual programs to continue the SOAR surveys and to develop ways to reach out to graduate faculty to address issues of climate, resources, and mentoring. As above, these results will be shared with the College Deans and the responsibility for addressing challenging and improve processes will reside with the Colleges.
- g. The OGS, in partnership with the Graduate Council, will conduct an annual analysis of surveys, cost-revenue data, benchmarking, etc. This analysis will help guide the strategic plan implementation, graduate policy revisions as appropriate and provide timely referrals of issues to Academic Senate, Deans Council, and the Provost Office for discussion and action plans.
- h. The OGS will partner with Graduate Enrollment Services to obtain and **analyze** market data in the development and consideration of the graduate program portfolio.

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**Strategic Theme 5 - Graduate Student Experience:**  
Creating an inclusive, diverse, and integrative graduate culture



*We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*

—T. S. Elliot, “Four Quartets”

Graduate education is not different from any endeavor that tests the limits of our knowledge, our will, and our passion; it requires deliberative persistence and commitment. At its best, a student-centered graduate experience **should** result in a much higher self awareness of our place in the world, balancing the student's desire for professional and personal recognition and success with the larger quests for societal good and global citizenship. Many institutions of higher education, including RIT, provide solid academic and technical-skills training, enabling the graduates to succeed in an increasingly challenging and constantly shifting workplace. Even at the most prestigious institutions, however, initiatives that enrich expertise in a specific scientific and technical field, and even an interdisciplinary setting, might fall short. For example, a recent survey of doctoral students at MIT reveals that only 20-40 % felt they were adequately prepared to lead a team, supervise others, manage a research group, or teach effectively (MIT Graduate Education strategic plan, 2011–2016). We know even less about how effectively universities prepare graduate students to be ethical and caring communicators, leaders and stewards of change, and engaged members of a community. The task force proposes a series of initiatives that will enable personal and professional skills that will enrich and expand the training acquired in individual programs. We anticipate that many of these efforts will be led by the OGS, as an expansion of the activities it started since its inception. The task force strongly suggests that RIT develop the intellectual and physical spaces that will enable our students and faculty to develop a strong graduate community and culture. With the exception of the small conference room that OGS has dedicated to graduate student meetings, there is currently **no dedicated** space on campus to adequately serve our graduate students; graduate student office space is also inadequate. The following recommendations are offered:

- a. **Strategic Goal** - Develop a year-round portfolio of professional and personal skill development **workshops and tutorials**, in partnership with various campus offices (Cooperative Education and Career Services, Library, Writing Center etc.) and colleges, aimed at complementing and enriching, rather than replacing, individual program content.

**Action Steps (themes for workshops and tutorials)**

- i. Basic thesis project planning and development.
- ii. Grant proposal writing with faculty and student peer mentoring.
- iii. Teaching skills and course curriculum development, integrated with the new teaching assistantship model, in support of Strategic Theme 3.e.
- iv. Time-management and career/personal balance.
- v. Professional and personal communication skills; effective use of technology for communication and networking.
- vi. Professional and personal integrity; awareness of global ethical issues.
- vii. Multicultural skills, cultural sensitivity training and diversity issues, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, hearing status, and differently able groups.
- viii. Leadership and innovation skills.
- ix. In collaboration with Colleges and the Provost's office, lead the creation of a University-wide inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary graduate seminar series.

### **Strategic Recommendations/Action Steps**

- b. Support the above activities by developing and maintaining an audio and video digital resource library for graduate student professional support accessible through the OGS portal to all students, including those deaf or hard of hearing.
- c. Develop and maintain a graduate student calendar aimed at supporting and advertising research seminars, exhibition opportunities (at RIT and neighboring institutions), professional development opportunities, grant opportunities, juried exhibitions, residencies, etc.
- d. In collaboration with Career Services, disseminate and improve on the full spectrum of national and international coop opportunities for graduate students.
- e. Enlist recent and experienced alumni willing to serve as mentors for current graduate students, complementing the advising provided by faculty and staff.
- f. In collaboration with offices across campus, provide resource training for graduate faculty, program directors, and graduate advisors, to enhance and update their ability to respond to critical graduate student needs. This training would address areas such as student wellness, mediation and conflict resolution, academic integrity issues, mentoring junior faculty on student mentoring, etc.
- g. Continue to offer and expand University-wide graduate orientation in collaboration with offices across campus, including access services. Graduate orientation will be the kick-off event for the year-long professional training workshops proposed above (5.a. through viii).
- h. Work with Student Affairs to review the representation of graduate students in student government, to be more reflective of the increased graduate enrollment.
- i. Work with the Graduate Student Advisory Committee and the Graduate Senator(s) to bring issues of concern to the attention of the administration and the Colleges, and provide effective advocacy for student needs.
- j. Lead the development of spaces, both actual and virtual, for graduate students to interact and network across colleges. To this end, year-round graduate student mixers, seminars featuring outside speakers and especially graduate alumni, will be organized, with strong student engagement. This will include facilitating equal access and interpreting services as needed.
- k. In partnership with the Office of Student Affairs, address issues of graduate campus life, such as housing, daycare, counseling, etc. Issues of campus life and campus services availability during summer and intersession should be specifically addressed, as these are times when graduate students are intensively engaged in research and artistic endeavors.

1. In partnership with individual graduate programs, promote international experiences (internships, collaborations, coops, lectureships, exchanges, etc.) as a way for graduate students to practice skills developed through the activities proposed above, enabling the education of global stewards of disciplines and trans-disciplines.

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**Concluding Thoughts: The Future of Graduate Education at RIT**



*The future ain't what it used to be.*  
—Yogi Berra

As we reflect on our hopes for the future of graduate education at RIT, we must recognize the overwhelming complexity of external forces affecting and effecting change in higher education **at large** (Delbanco, 2012). We **should also recognize** that a future for graduate education that we can create and steward at RIT is entirely up to us, as a community of teachers-scholars (faculty) and leaders/creators/innovators-in-training (graduate students). The future is both worrisome and hopeful, maddening and exhilarating—a path with many puddles and perhaps a Golden Pond. The task force has contended with these dualities during **many** months of information gathering, thoughtful outreach, and vigorous discussion. We present the elements of this strategic plan to the RIT community as a conscientious and deliberative framework to engage all of us in respectful, selfless, and transparent dialogue on the future of our graduate prospects, in the best tradition of shared governance. We **have proposed** five integrative, interrelated, interdependent, and iterative themes that should help get us to a place that elicits collective pride. As with any plan and its implementation, it could be modified and improved, but hopefully not upset, by the proverbial devil in the details. The task force thanks the RIT community for the opportunity to propose this plan, and looks forward to **the next phase of our conversation, the implementation of this plan.**

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## **Appendices:**

- 1) Task Force Charge and membership
- 2) S.O.A.R. survey of graduate program directors
- 3) PhD student survey
- 4) MS level student survey

- 5) Graduate student survey graphs
- 6) Concept map of graduate education at RIT (prepared by Esa Rantanen)
- 7) Cost model for graduate programs at RIT (from Office of F&A)

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